



Butte County High School science classes will benefit from one of two \$10,000 Science Laboratory Grants INL awarded this year to establish or upgrade a chemistry or physical science lab.

Idaho National Laboratory grants thousands to science classrooms

by [Kortny Rolston](#), INL Communications & Public Affairs

Ever since Brecia Hanson returned to her alma mater to teach, the Butte County High School instructor has striven to prepare her students for college-level chemistry, biology and anatomy. But with little money for new science equipment, that has become increasingly hard to do. Her anatomy skeleton is missing bones, and her lab is down to a single working burette — standard glassware used for chemistry experiments — which her 28 students shared all school year.

Hanson has relied on \$350 she gets annually from the state for supplies to stock her classroom with the basic equipment she needs to teach chemistry, biology, anatomy and ecology.

"That amount doesn't go very far in a science classroom," she said. "I was over that by \$200 last year and had to borrow from the other teachers to cover it."

This fall, however, money won't be a problem. Hanson was one of two Idaho teachers selected to receive an Idaho National Laboratory grant of up to \$10,000 for new science equipment.

Hanson was awarded \$9,296.90, which will pay for burettes, ultraviolet spectral photometers for titration lessons, and ovens that will let her teach students about chemistry through cooking.

INL has long funded Idaho schools through its Mini Grant program, which provides teachers up to \$2,000 for science, math and technology supplies. This is the first year it has offered \$10,000 Science Laboratory Grants to either establish or upgrade a chemistry or physical science lab.

"Outfitting a high school science lab with new equipment is not cheap and a lot of schools just don't have the money," said Melinda Hamilton, INL's education programs director. "We felt this was a good way for a teacher to upgrade or create a whole lab at once."

Hanson said the new equipment will go a long way toward readying her students for college, where the chemistry and other science labs are high-tech. The 1998 Butte High graduate remembers how ill prepared she felt during her first few chemistry classes in college.

"I had never been exposed to any of it," she said. "I wasn't introduced to a spectral photometer until organic chemistry in college. I felt like I had to catch up."

Hanson doesn't want that for her students.

Butte County High School Principal Robert Chambers said Hanson's grant, along with the \$2,000 award INL gave Arco Elementary School teacher Donna McCurdy, have been cause for celebration in the small, rural community.

Like a lot of districts, Butte County has been forced to cut back. Administrators are not filling several vacant positions to help the district save money.

"We don't have a lot of money for extras so when we get something like this, it's very exciting for everyone," Chambers said.

Hamilton said INL started the grant program to help teachers implement innovative ideas.

"We wish we had more to give out," she said. "We know there is a need and INL is committed to improving science, technology, engineering and math ([STEM](#)) education in Idaho."



Hanson said the INL grant would spare her students from the unprepared feeling she had entering college from an ill-equipped high school science lab.

